

LUBOV

GARAGE

ART | By ANNA BANE; illustrated by ANNA BANE | Jan 22 2021, 8:45am

"Solace" in the Afternoon

An illustrated visit to Brooklyn-based artist Marsha Pels' retrospective at Lubov delivers a Bling Ring spectacle.

On an overcast afternoon in January, I found myself strolling down East Broadway with a friend. The sidewalk brimmed with crates of off-season tropical fruit, crabs escaped from curbside coolers, and toddlers testing the slack of their urbanite-parents' leashes. As we zigzagged through the scampering crustaceans and children, my friend mentioned that there was an art exhibit nearby she wanted to check out. Towards the end of the block we reached Dim Sum GO GO, and just before I suggested we may have walked too far, she declared, "Here we are!" The address, 5 East Broadway, was about as close to the Manhattan Bridge as you could get without merging onto the on-ramp.



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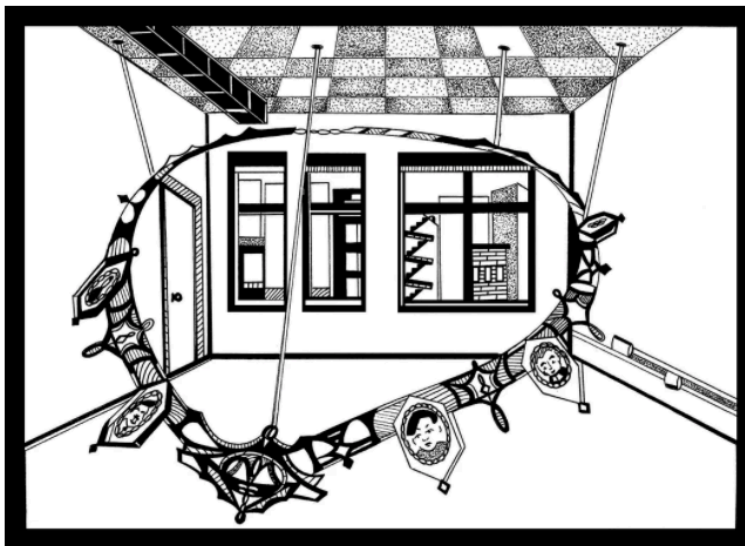
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We scanned the signs to the right of the grated door adorned with a gilded 5, listings for unassuming businesses denoted in Chinese characters and phone numbers: Sunrider, Room #301, Chatham Tax & Accounting Inc., Room #304, and finally, engraved on a silver plate with a serif font, “LUBOV.” As we gazed toward the clouds, the ground floor restaurant’s cherry-red awning encouraged us to venture vertically, shouting, “*Go, go, go!*” And so we thrust the door open and climbed, climbed, climbed the four flights leading to the gallery. Sanitizing our hands and shedding mask-fogged glasses, we snagged a press release at the end of a narrow hall and made a sharp left for Marsha Pels, Solace.

We were immediately greeted by Francisco Correa Cordero, Lubov’s founder. He was seated at a bare desk in a white room: to his right, a small table piled with books, above him, textured ceiling panels, reminding us that the space was an antiseptic office in a past life. Described as a “hyper-compressed” retrospective, the exhibit featured two works by the Brooklyn-based artist: *Fallout Necklace*, 2018 and *Pieta*, 1998. Hung from the ceiling of adjacent rooms divided by a curtain, each sculpture furnished the gallery like a grandiose chandelier from a near dystopia. As the press release described, both were “examinations of the vicissitudes of power [asking] us to consider from whom we expect compassion, and who inevitably fails to deliver.”



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Framed by three windows overlooking Kimlau Square, *Fallout Necklace* imposed itself on the front room, a colossus rendered weightless vis-à-vis hairline suspension cords. As if from the collection Dr. Strangelove for Cartier, the necklace was cast in aluminum and enameled with flame-worked glass; featuring six powder-printed pendants of Tartarean politicians: Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Theresa May, Emmanuel Macron, Bashar al-Assad, Angela Merkel, and Kim Jong-un. We paced around the diadem, admiring Pels' baroque metalwork. As a student of art history learned in hieratic scale, and—if not implied by the former—a career daydreamer with an overactive imagination, I initiated a game of “Who *would* wear it best?” A grande dame...a shameless figurehead...someone larger-than-life, *literally*. With an exchanged grin and *aha!* we concurred, no one could pull it off better than our hostess of the American *scheme*—ice for the Trojan horse of ICE—Lady Liberty.



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Francisco flipped open a catalogue on the table and beckoned us forth, revealing a spread of charmingly antiquated black-and-white reproductions of earrings, bracelets, and tiaras. He explained that Pels designed the sculpture in the style of “Cut-Steel and Berlin Iron” jewelry, a fashion trend from 19th-century France and Germany in which royals awarded these alloy accessories to aristocratic women who had graciously donated their precious stones to sponsor national war efforts, ready-to-wear propaganda crowning the (family) crest of the promontory overlooking insatiable empires. Gazing back at *Fallout Necklace* lost in thought, I mused on a countess showboating her noble bling at a going away party for Napoleon Bonaparte.

I recalled a scene from Sofia Coppola’s Ladurée-thirst film *Marie Antoinette*, in which a gallant Steve Coogan (playing Florimond Claude) promenades through a manicured garden with the queen at Versailles, imploring Kirsten Dunst’s Antoinette to care better for her citizenry. “Life is getting harder for the people of France,” he sighs, “the bread shortage is grave.” In the preceding scene, haughty from an unfair exchange of court gossip with the Duchesse de Polignac, the queen disparages: “Let them eat cake? That’s such nonsense, I would never say that!” Her response to Claude summons a similarly unappetizing trifle of pity: “Well, there must be something the king can do to ease their sufferings. Tell the court jeweler to stop sending diamonds,” turning to a tyke Marie-Thérèse, “You don’t need any diamonds, do you?”



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Pulling the curtain aside to reveal a carpeted back room we confronted *Pieta*, a gas mask fused to a fetish-gear bodice—immaculately cast in bronze—with a crystalline baby Jesus cradled in her extended arms, as if a sacrifice offered to appease a coming Armageddon. Her phantom limbs ushered us back into the world we abandoned downstairs, a landmine of insurrection, impeachment, and iconoclasm. A harbinger from 1998, the Madonna dissuaded make-believe in a place called Hope and encores of an early-aughts “HOPE,” expressing with her rabbit’s-hole eyes that nothing was ever emphatically Great this side of the Atlantic. We layered up and bid Francisco farewell; descended the stairwell and stepped out into the brisk air of our Grave New World.

https://garage.vice.com/en_us/article/5dpjkk/solace-in-the-afternoon

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